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-	0	4391601.URPN.	USPAT	2002/05/01 14:27
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-	32	kosher	EPO; JPO; DERWENT; IBM_TDB	2002/05/01 14:58
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-	4541	((pen or writing near1 (implement or tool or utensil) or quill)) and ((pen or writing near1 (implement or tool or utensil) or quill).ab.)	USPAT; US-PGPUB	2002/05/09 11:52
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Voice, Image, Gesture: Selections from the Jewish Museum's Collection, 1945-2000.

Jewish Museum

1109 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10128; (212) 423 3200
 Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, Thursday – 11am – 5:45pm;
 Tuesday 11am-8pm; (after 5pm, pay what you wish)
 \$8 adults; \$5.50 students and seniors; Tuesdays after 5pm free.
 Until August 5, 2001

Jewish Museum Reflections

Museums, like people, occasionally reflect on what their goals are, how well they are reaching them and how effective they are. They frequently do this in exhibitions drawn from their permanent collections in shows that are almost always more assertive of what they think they represent than questioning the underlying assumptions. It is our job, as the perceptive audience, to assess their direction, its validity and success. This is exactly what is happening in Voice, Image, Gesture: Selections from the Jewish Museum's Collection, 1945-2000.

This exhibition examines fine art, ceremonial objects and broadcast media created since 1945. In the press release the Museum states that it "effects a diversity of perspective on Jewish history and contemporary culture—to illuminate how a broad range of works of art and media confront history, create spaces of memory, question boundaries between abstraction and representation, and enact ritual." In truth, the exhibition does many of these things in a selection of 60 different works and many video selections from Museum's National Jewish Archive of Broadcasting. But my question of the Jewish Museum is how many of these works actively or seriously address Jewish subject matter or concerns. Does the work confront and engage a specifically Jewish world, with Jewish ideas and content. I found many were Jewishly successful and unfortunately many that seemed to miss the "Jewish content mark."

The exhibition opens with what may be one of the most striking works in the show, Andy Warhol's Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century that portrays Sarah Bernhardt, Louis Brandeis, Martin Buber, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, George Gershwin, Franz Kafka, the Marx Brothers, Golda Meir and Gertrude Stein. Ten large silkscreen portraits from famous photos that become graphic colorful Pop images, perfect as a marketing tool in a cool ad campaign. These are striking images that banalize and reduce Jewish achievements to slick fame. Very postmodern but not so Jewish.

In the next gallery there are large photographs, neon lights that proclaim "Ich bin Jude" and various other works. The Jews and Gender video presentation was a thoughtful and eclectic collection of Jewish stereotypes presented, manipulated and transformed over the last twenty years on television. Like a bad old movie, they create thoughtful reflections upon the things we used to accept without comment. But are we, in our popular entertainment, any wiser, less superficial, now?

Richard McBee

4/16/2001



Franz Kafka (1980) Silkscreen print and colophon by Andy Warhol

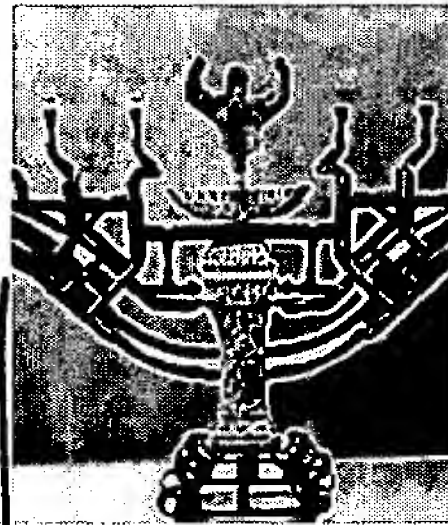
"Unorthodox Menorah II" (1993) seemed intriguing. This large menorah by Joel Otterson presents us with, at first impression, a brash and iconoclastic version of the Hanukah menorah. The base is a garish lamp vase, the branches are made of common plumber's copper tubing and the shamash is formed by the pop image of strength and power of Hulk Hogan. But what began as an irreverent affront becomes a genuine Jewish response to the holiday of lights. The lamp base is in fact, just that, perhaps not in my personal taste, but nevertheless appropriate for its function. The use of common workman's materials relates directly to the fact that upon purifying the Temple, the Menorah of rededication was made of whatever was at hand (some say it was wood). And Hulk Hogan fits perfectly to commemorate the fact that at the heart of Hanukah is a military victory in a civil war that had to be won with pure guts, bravery and determination. While I may not want this menorah to light with, it deals with serious Jewish content in a unique and startling way.

Among the other works that engage the viewer with Jewish content is a work by the master silversmith, Ludwig Wolpert, a silkscreen on fiberglass with a mesmerizing inscription from Pikei Avot. His use of simple and modern materials in a floor to ceiling scroll transforms the text we know and love. The great American abstract expressionist, Adolph Gottlieb, is represented with an enormous Torah curtain done in 1951 for the Congregation B'nai Israel in Millburn, New Jersey. The compartmentalized forms of Jewish symbols, reflecting his paintings at the time, were created by women of the congregation in velvet and appliqued and embroidered metallic thread, supervised by the artist's wife, Esther Gottlieb. While the final product does not match the intensity of his paintings, the Torah curtain becomes a very modern folk object.

One of the important new acquisitions shown here is Eclipse of God (2000) by R.B. Kitaj. This work is a reaction to an Italian Renaissance painting by Paolo Uccello, The Miracle of the Profaned Host (1468). Kitaj's response to the original anti-Semitic slur is intriguing in its attempt to shift the focus of the drama to the dilemma of the unjustly accused Jewish family. His work reverses the original metaphor so that it is the family that is now profaned and made into victims. The work is primarily interesting in that it insists upon challenging anti-Semitism in its original Christian context, as found in some Italian Renaissance art.

There are works by non-Jews that challenge the traditional forms and understandings of Jewish objects. Tzedakahbako (2000) by Kay Sekimachi is a totally unique tzedakah box made of linen fiber, beautifully woven. The 'box' stands on its own and the folded top is opened to use. The soft and pliant form of the simple yet beautiful material wonderfully reflects the emotions of warmth and generosity associated with this most central of mitzvot.

Finally, one of the most startling works is part of a mixed media installation, A Postcolonial Kinderhood (1994) by Elaine Reichek. These works take the form of traditional hand-embroidered samplers, the kind that evoke all the traditional family values of home and hearth bound up in the colonial American past. Instead we find, in the midst of these embroidered images, disquieting texts such as; "I used to fall asleep every night thinking of places to hide when the SS came. I never thought this was in the least bit strange." These challenging works make us question and reassess the sureties of a nostalgic view of the old traditional world. And perhaps they tell us, like many good works of art always do, that we are in a very new world now and the past is one place



Unorthodox Menorah II
(1993)
Mixed metals, glass,
porcelain by Joel
Otterson



Eclipse of God
(After the Uccello's
Panel Called Breaking
Down the Jew's Door)
1997-2000 oil on
canvas by R.B. Kitaj

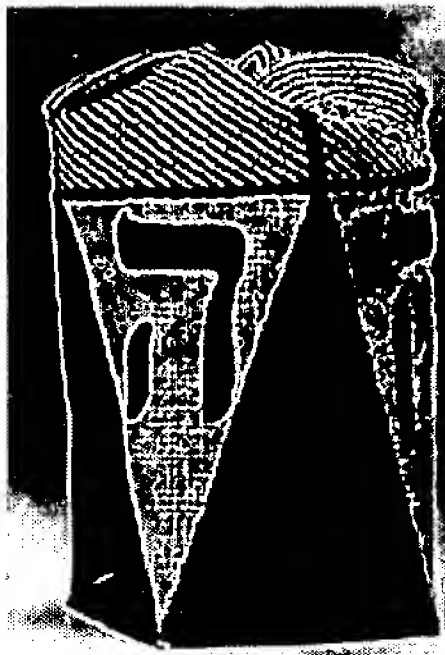
We can't go back to any more.

The Jewish Museum has mounted a diverse show that presents some Jewish art that connects with serious Jewish ideas and content. Other works have a much more tenuous connection; a Jewish name, an intellectual notion that distantly relates to Jews, or a fashionable avant-garde conceit. Contemporary works of Jewish art that struggle with serious Jewish content are being produced by many artists today but without the support of our cultural institutions, like the Jewish Museum, Jewish culture like this may wither and die. I encourage the Jewish Museum to continue to mount exhibitions like this one of serious contemporary Jewish art. The future depends on it.

Richard McBee
April 16, 2001

Richard McBee is a painter of Torah subject matter and writer on Jewish Art. He is active in the American Guild of Judaic Art ([jewishart.org](http://www.jewishart.org)) and the Young Israel of Fifth Avenue. Please feel free to email him with comments at mcbee@escape.com.

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*Tzedakahbako (2000)
Linen fiber by Kay
Sekimachi*



Gallery Synagogue Adornments

The Synagogue is a building or room for worship, study, and meeting. The Aron Kodesh (Holy Ark) is central to the synagogue as it is a small chamber that houses the Torah(s), the holy scrolls, containing the first five books of the Old Testament. Special attention is paid to these accoutrements which are thoughtfully and beautifully clothed in rich fabrics.

Holocaust Torah Mantle

This mantle was created as a memorial to the Six Million and as a tribute to the Jews of Lostice, Czechoslovakia since it dresses a Torah from that city and is itself a survivor of the Holocaust.



For Purchase

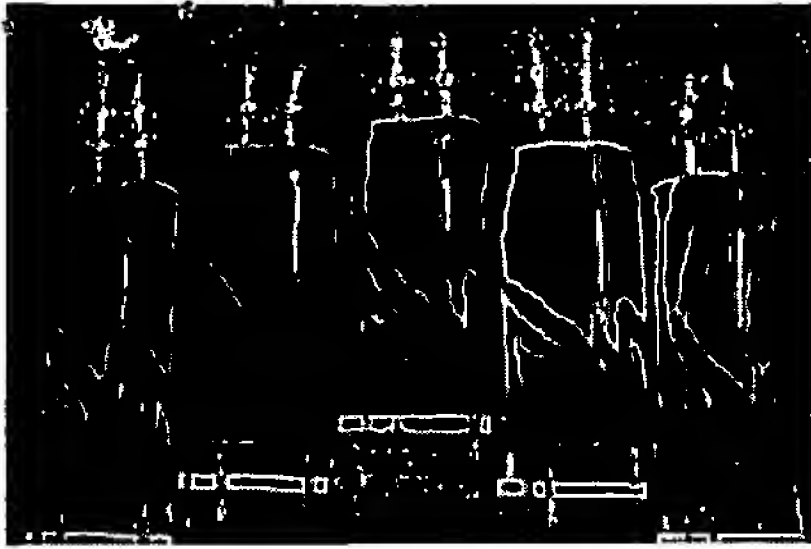
The arms clothed in prison garb reach up in despair. The hands filled with yearning and tension symbolize their courage as they reach for G-d.

This Mantle is a limited edition. It may be special ordered to fit your specific Torah.

The Hebrew letters forming the words Am Yisrael Chai also reach up to G-d proclaiming that in spite of it all, "The People of Israel Live". The rosebuds at the top symbolize life, hope and beauty affirming that our people will continue to be "...a light unto the nations..." -

(Commissions taken)
\$1200

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Festival Mantles

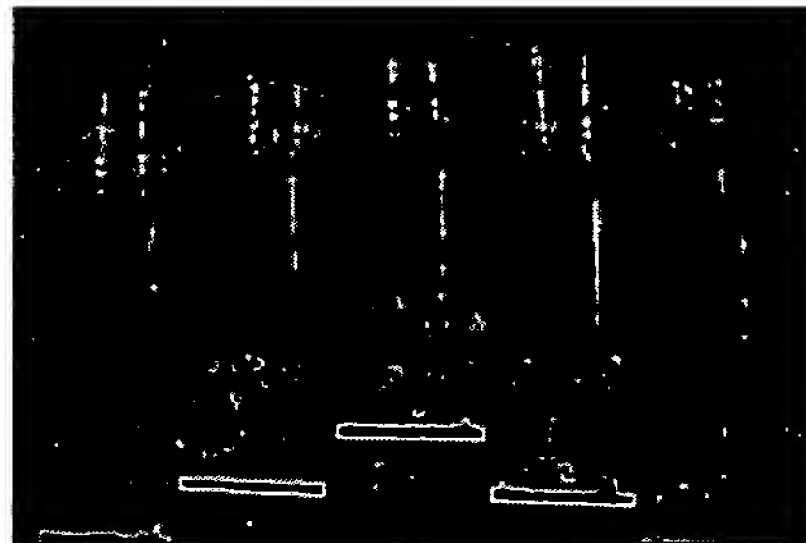
The Aron Kodesh of Congregation Brith Sholom, Bethlehem, PA is adorned with these two sets of Elsa's Torah Mantles (these and the mantles below). There is a lightness to the hand-dyed silk set that is especially used for the festivals. The playful shapes of the appliqued letters and the dancing bouncing, tassels give a sense of joy, gladness and mirth that hopefully comes with the celebration of the holidays.

NFS

Commissions taken for Torah Mantles from \$900

Torah Mantle Set

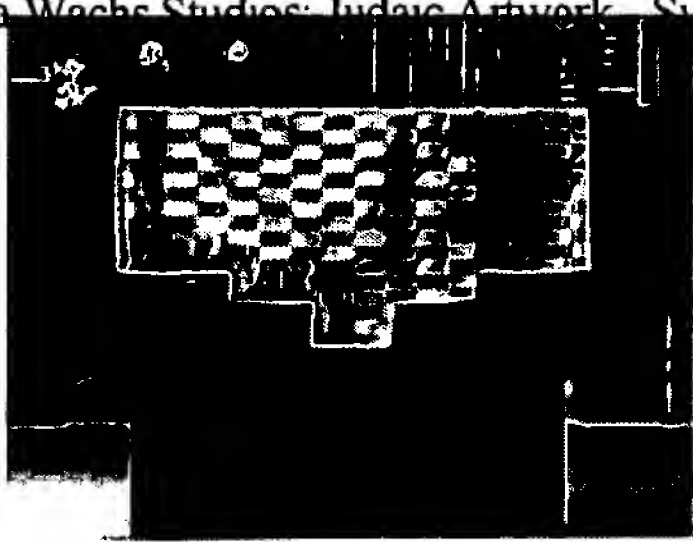
The blush-burgundy Torah mantle set at Congregation Brith Sholom, Bethlehem, PA, for daily and Shabbat have educational overtones. Each mantle has the name of one of the books of the Torah with the name of the individual parchiot that appear in that book. The Hebrew letters are texturally stitched in interlocking patterns and colors creating an aleph-bet of mystery.



Quilting lines emanate from the outlined shapes of the wording echoing the messages that are contained within.

NFS

Commissions taken for Torah Mantles from \$900

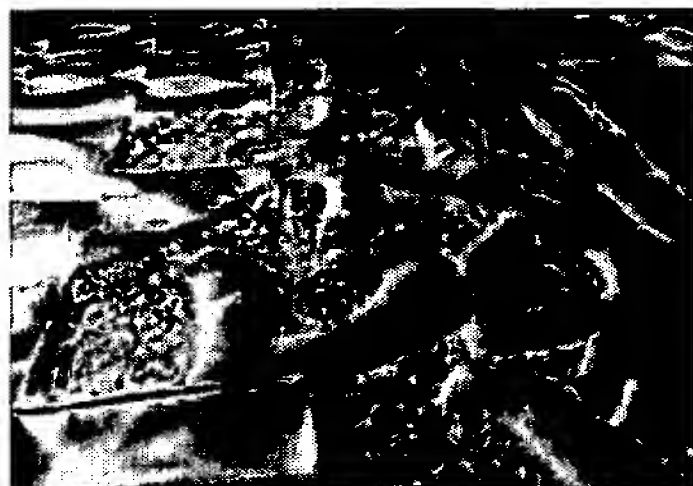


Gray Reading Table Cover

The theme of this shulchan cover is Jacob's Ladder. The design represents the going forward into the light of reason, learning and knowledge. The steps spell out the quote from Mica, "...to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy G-d."

NFS - Commissioned by children of Rabbi Emeritus to honor his retirement Congregation Ohev Shalom, Wallingford, PA

Orders taken for custom table covers from \$1200

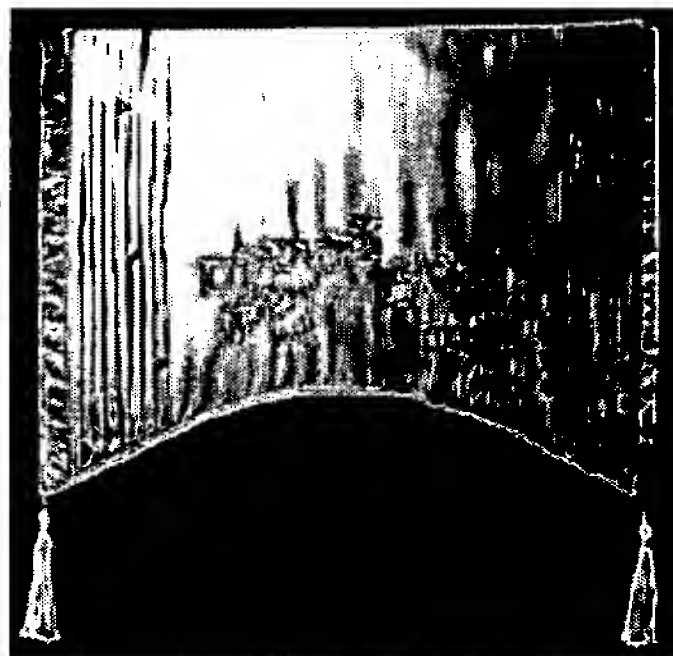


Detail:

The vermicelli stitching around each of the letters raises the padded fabric allowing the light to play off the curved undulating shapes. Gray and silver threads were used for this adding to the subtlety of the design.

High Holy Day Shulchan Cover

The embroidered Hebrew verse translates: "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." A strong design element in this Shulchan cover is the layering of fabric that has been pleated. It simulates the echoing and reverberations of the The stirring sounds of the shofar bringing us back to places inside ourselves.....to the very root of our being.



There are three bands symbolizing the three fold sounding of tekiah, teruah, tekiah and the three special sections of the Rosh Ha Shanah amidah. Shards of gold and silver are a metaphor here as in the Malkhuyot section proclaiming God's sovereignty over the universe.

The Hebrew characters of the verse are outlined making each letter empty conveying the message that the word 'shofar' means hollow---The Shofar is a hollow instrument that becomes important only when a person's breath enters it--That breath can move man to do wondrous things. We can see ourselves at Rosh Ha Shanah as the hollow shofar having the potential to fill it with many accomplishments and good deeds.

NFS

Orders taken for custom table covers from \$1200

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